

Inscriptions

– contemporary thinking on art, philosophy and psycho-analysis –
<https://inscriptions.tankebanen.no/>

Title: Event and elevation

Author: David Ritchie

Section: Academic articles

Abstract: What is it like, the event in which we become ourselves? What is its relationship to other kinds of event? And *where* might the event happen? When people say today that they “stand with” or that they are “allies,” they are challenging hierarchical notions about how change happens, ones that derive from agreements about elevation. When someone says all men are created equal they could be saying, all men stand together on a flat plain. “Standing with” suggests the tactics of non-violent protest, people gathering in large numbers in a flat area and hoping that the sight of those large numbers will persuade someone somewhere to change what needs changing. When we climb onto a podium or write a thesis statement, we conjure inherited, one might say ghostly geometry: one person up, others watching, listening, reacting below. Other forms of address, made possible by technology, may require cultural adjustments.

Keywords: event; elevation; making a stand; standing with

Copyright © 2022 Ritchie.

Correspondence: David Ritchie, e: profdritchie@gmail.com.

Received: 6 October, 2021.

Accepted: 25 November, 2021.

Published: 15 January, 2022.

How to cite: Ritchie, David. “Event and elevation.” *Inscriptions* 5, no. 1 (January 2022): 64–73.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) (CC BY). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.

Event and elevation

David Ritchie¹

Abstract

What is it like, the event in which we become ourselves? What is its relationship to other kinds of event? And *where* might the event happen? When people say today that they “stand with” or that they are “allies,” they are challenging hierarchical notions about how change happens, ones that derive from agreements about elevation. When someone says all men are created equal they could be saying, all men stand together on a flat plain. “Standing with” suggests the tactics of non-violent protest, people gathering in large numbers in a flat area and hoping that the sight of those large numbers will persuade someone somewhere to change what needs changing. When we climb onto a podium or write a thesis statement, we conjure inherited, one might say ghostly geometry: one person up, others watching, listening, reacting below. Other forms of address, made possible by technology, may require cultural adjustments.

Keywords: event; elevation; making a stand; standing with

What is it like, the event in which we become ourselves? This is the question with which I began. Because I write plays, that question quickly became, “Where does it happen?” Even *Waiting for Godot* had stage directions indicating where the non-events, maybe anti-events would happen, “A country road. A tree.” At this point my mind adds details to that setting – the tree is small and bare; it sits on a hummock, which is about the size of a small midden. These details are not in the stage directions, but they were in productions I saw. My first suggestion is that although humans don’t mind, “Once upon a time” as an introductory phrase – odd though “upon a time” now sounds – we also require a setting. Everything happens somewhere, so the question becomes how much detail we require here about where we might become ourselves? A preview of my

answer: there might well be a hill. Possibly also a tree.

Revising an essay that was written earlier in a continuing project runs the risk of molehill becoming mountain. I am reminded of the inscription on a statue in the T.V. series *The Simpsons*, “A noble spirit embiggens the smallest man.” Growing we think of as good, embiggening too, perhaps. But not swelling. I mention this because in a subsequent essay I want to consider both swales and swells, also living in a midden. When I reached a certain point in the process of revision, a friend called my attention to Samantha Power’s introduction to a newer edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.² Awed by that project once more, I burrowed down, dug my way forward, hoping possibly to become some unblinded version of

¹ PNCA/ Willamette University.

² Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken, 2004.)

the true mole.³

Heidegger's event, like many an intellectual transformation, could take place in private. Martin Luther thinking through his theses comes to mind.⁴ But anyone who has reflected on creativity and thinking will notice solitude's potential contribution. Darwin had a thinking path, so he could tread where none disturbed; Nietzsche and Sartre stood before trees.⁵ We are familiar with tales of spirit quests, and with going to the desert for forty days and nights. We know of T.E. Lawrence's theory that the emergence of monotheisms in the Sinai was a consequence of time spent in a particular landscape.⁶ But anyone who has been in a classroom or lecture hall and wandered off mentally will know that thoughtful solitude can also be found when surrounded by others. P.G. Wodehouse wrote while detained on serious charges and locked up within a Parisian maternity ward. As an experiment I once deliberately took my notes and papers to a big box store's food court and wrote beside the tire sales counter. I think we can agree that Heidegger's event is unlikely to occur in that location.

But how public might Heidegger's event be, and is it less or more likely to take place in similar locations to what we call historical events? Is there such a thing as a place where an historical event is likely to happen? Many people think so.⁷

E.H. Carr argued that historic events belonged to something like a gentleman's club; everyone who was anyone agreed that some events were "sound," meaning clubbable. Other happenings might only be *considered* for membership.⁸ Then came the *longue durée* and postmodernism and theory, and what everyone knows about changes in the humanities over the past few decades. Would Heidegger's event, like Sartre's nausea-inducing swirl, and even the psychologists' "ah-ha moment" possibly now be included?

Though trained by an intellectual historian – H. Stuart Hughes – I did not become one. He was a tidy man and might not have approved the metaphorical thinking path I have walked. In an era in which the major questions among British historians concerned rebellion, revolution, how normal or regular folk effect change, Stuart Hughes had undergone Freudian therapy and possibly as a result was interested in how changes of mind happen in and among people we have (since the Dreyfus Affair) called Intellectuals. I hope I am not being too simplistic when I say that his central idea was that there are cohorts of thinkers whose intercourse results in a governing set of notions, a *zeitgeist*. I am more interested in regular folk than he was, and how they effect change is not the limit of my interest in their ways. My continuing project is to examine English vocabulary and material culture of many sorts, and to see what

³ I know very little about moles. *Wikipedia* says the true mole is not related to other burrowers: pink fairy armadillos, tuco-tucos, mole rats, mole crabs and so on. But golden moles share a common ancestor with elephants, manatees and aardvarks.

⁴ <https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/8510>.

⁵ Damon Young, author of *How to Think About Exercise*, in *Psychology Today*. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/how-think-about-exercise/201501/charles-darwins-daily-walks>.

⁶ "To the thinkers of the town the impulse into Nitria had ever been irresistible, not probably that they found God dwelling there, but that in its solitude they heard more certainly the living word they brought with them." T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (New York: Anchor Books, 1991) 39.

⁷ Susan Seubert's thesis was photographs of landscapes where murders had taken place. The evident tension was between the ordinarieness of the location and the horror of the event; the settings seemed wrong. Different example: consider how often commentators on television predict, before an event has taken place, that it will be "historic." Location plays a role in our allowing such words to wash over us, without objection.

⁸ E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (New York: Vintage, 1967).

samples may tell us about the wider world. In this instance I began with the midden, a small rise of rubbish; now we turn to the podium, with hills and triangles in the background; and next mountains and crescendos.⁹ To elaborate, because we could easily get lost as we wander: in this essay I'm considering how we understand elevation and where we expect changes of mind to happen. Let me offer a preview of my conclusion: when people say today that they "stand with" or that they are "allies," they are challenging hierarchical notions about how change happens, ones that derive from agreements about rightful elevation. When someone says all men are created equal they could be saying, all men stand together on a flat plain. "Standing with" evokes in my mind the tactics of non-violent protest, people gathering in large numbers in a flat area and hoping that the sight of those large numbers will persuade someone somewhere to change what needs changing. When we climb onto a podium or write a thesis statement, we conjure inherited, one might say ghostly geometry: one person up, others watching, listening, reacting below. The sideways, sharing address, made possible by technology, is new and will require cultural adjustments.

Here I shrink from the dialects of sub-disciplines and fights over whether the contingency of facts can be unlimitedly otherwise. No offense intended. I think the question, "What do I know?" is a good starting point, maybe the best starting point except for, "What do I doubt?" Of course the problem with wide-ranging exploration is that the thinker may over-reach. Only when knowledge becomes sure and certain can it be expressed as an equation, or something equally compact. I begin with a snake because it comes from mythology and acts as an anchor. The snake is an anchor,

how Beckett is that? But we'll save the absurd for later. Meanwhile, we'll put one foot in front of another, for there are bumps to negotiate, Munros even.

As I stepped off with my dog I came across a snake, nothing dangerous, just a small garter. Two characteristics of the snake popped into my head: it could not make a sound and it could not stand. I was reminded of a saying I saw in a collection of Trini, one long ago returned to lender, the title forgotten and thus lost to footnotes. Trini is the folk language of Trinidad, which is said on the web to be, "one of the most fascinating languages on earth." Hyperbole, but I too love the mix of Trini (mix being a word that turns up often in that vocabulary). The saying went, "If snake come out of de jungle an' say 'snake dey,' snake dey!" I think that means, "take threats at face value." Enter "stand with" into a search engine and you may find: "We Stand With – Shattering Mental Health Stigma"; "Home/ We Stand With Ozone"; "The Case – We Stand With Nikki"; "We Stand With Christ"; on and on. The story of this pairing is not the tale of a sudden and recent rise; the incidence of "standing with" has risen since 2000, but at least in Google's count there is less "standing with" today than there was in the first decade of the nineteenth century.¹⁰

"Taking a stand" has spread around the world, with nuances of meaning. In Spanish you hold your arms so, in Italian it's a military metaphor, in French it's getting one's portion, and in Norwegian a recent import, "*Vi står opp for trykkefriheten*" appears to mean that we fight for freedom of speech, while traditionally it would have meant that we get up in the morning because of this freedom."¹¹

⁹ David Ritchie, "Consider the Midden," *Inscriptions* vol. 4, no 2, 2021, 170–182

¹⁰ https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=stand+with&year_start=1800&year_end=2019&corpus=26&smoothing=3&direct_url=t1%3B%2Cstand%20with%3B%2Cc0.

¹¹ Personal correspondence.

Early in my career I gave two papers: a history of how nineteenth and twentieth century doctors posed in paintings, and a history of the Freshman essay. The first subject came to me when I failed to answer a simple question – why do doctors wear white coats? I looked at a lot of paintings and couldn't find the answer, but I noticed a completely different transformation, a change of pose. At the beginning of the nineteenth century doctors didn't seem to know how to look wise in a painting; after Rodin and illustrations in *Sherlock Holmes*, thoughtful subjects look down, forming a triangle that begins at the eyes and finishes below. This is what Sartre's character does in *Nausea*. "Look, tree roots!" This is the opposite of looking up at church ceilings, the light on the tops of trees, distant peaks. At least in paintings, people who look up seem to ask for heavenly guidance. Gaze at the horizon as in posters of Mitterrand or Mao, and you see the red dawn dawning. Why are statues put on plinths and horses? Poses speak.

I had written essays in English, French and American universities. Each was different. The English essay, to be read aloud in a tutorial, was freeform, declared a subject, played with cards held close to the chest, revealed a conclusion only in the final paragraph. French professors, by contrast, had strict demands concerning form. At the University of Grenoble I wrote an essay that compared Molière, Racine, and Shakespeare. The professor returned it held between two fingers, as if it had fallen into mire. "What is this?" I said it was my essay. Severe downward look, "This is not an essay." Perhaps it was a pipe?

Many Americans are formally strict, and much in love with the Thesis Statement. My bread and butter in graduate school was teaching students to take a stand, to formulate a thesis, to fend off challenges, like Phoenicians at sea. Students got being at sea, and it gave them no comfort. Very few were interested in writing to discover what they thought. To

many "proving your point with a thesis statement and a whole bunch of evidence" seemed an empty exercise. Where was the real-life counterpart to this exercise? Some who were not seated in the front row looked down, to avoid being invited to inquire.

The fact that two revolutionary documents, *Common Sense* and *The Rights of Man*, succeeded where others failed demonstrates that humanity aspires to, has expectations of some kind of leveling, but it is not evidence that success is inevitable or that the conjoining of "last" with "stand" is accidental or rare. Venturing out, doing some hard thinking before taking a stand, these are not common acts, so we notice when and where they happen. Do much of this and an event, or even the event, may occur. One risks becoming, but also brickbats. A friend tells me that the meaning of *shin* 信, common to Japanese and Chinese writing, is standing in place beside one's words. People who do this are trustworthy. For thousands of years we trusted people who live as we do and where we do. We now live where and how we can and move as needed.

But we repeat shapes, in our narratives for example, that are hill-like and tense. We demonstrate nostalgia for the appearance of security at some elevations, mixed with a sense that it could all go wrong. We tell our children that Jack and Jill went up the hill, as did the Grand Old Duke of York. Two came tumbling down and the third seems absurd. We know that hills can be dangerous, and yet we yearn for them, delighted when Maria sings, "I go to the hills when my heart is lonely/ I know I will hear what I've heard before." I am reminded of the passage in *Troilus and Cressida* that compares society to a well-ordered hive – take but degree away, untune that string and, hark, what discord follows! Bees are about their business beneath a hill-like roof, which keeps chaos and the elements out. The authors of "Beyond the Fringe" found humor in the idea that when the end of the world threatened, like the Grand

Old Duke or Christopher Robin, humans go halfway, neither up nor down but sufficiently high to be safe from the mighty wind.

Moot Hill, which rises in the grounds of Scone Castle, was a gathering place. Kings were crowned there atop a stone, the Stone of Scone, until Edward I of England stole the stone and placed it beneath the coronation throne of English kings and queens. But Moot Hill was also where important matters were discussed in the manner of Iceland's Althing or a Husting. Today's lawyers will know of moots, discussions of hypothetical cases. Today's scouts or guides attend meetings called moots. And those who know Old English will recognize *mót* and *gemót*, words from which our word "meet" is derived. A moot was not always held outdoors; in early English history a moot was a building where people met to decide matters. From outdoors and indoors we have inherited the phrase, "the point is moot" which means today, strangely, "not worth arguing."

Pictish King Nectan traveled to Moot Hill to embrace the Church of Rome. As in many early churches, ancient belief systems were thus subsumed by the new. There are suggestions that the hill is a burial cairn like those on Orkney. At one time it was called the Hill of Credulity. So, one originally pagan hill, considerable freight of meanings. It is an introductory example. We would need to stare like Cézanne truly to begin to understand hills.

My grandfather was wounded in the *Kaiser-schlacht*, the German Big Push at the end of the First World War. His account describes making a stand on the slopes of a hill, being encouraged by hard fighting to the right, falling back when the left collapsed. He was wounded by shrapnel as he made his way down the reverse side of the slope.

One problem with hills in human military history is they can be surrounded, Masada being the most famous example. If you are going to make a stand on a hilltop, you want what my grandfather had, a line of retreat. When there is not one – the Vercors and Montmartre come to mind as historical examples – as at Masada, the consequences were awful.

Yet we are pleased to recall heroic stands, where people on a hilltop defied the odds; Waterloo and Gettysburg to name but two. And then there's Golgotha, a stand of a different kind.

These are historical events, not Heidegger's Event, a change of mind, a rupture that changes the mode of being. But if asked where any dramatic change of mind might take place, I suggest that at one time people would have said, "Where stands are taken, on a low hill, metaphorical or physical." Change involved struggles with power. That's where power lived, up the hill, away from the miasma and stink, with an overview of all below.

Perhaps because such struggles failed so often, humans treasure imaginary images of heroic stands. Depictions of Custer's death had a pictorial shape that we now know to be nonsense – Native Americans circling, Custer at the apex of a triangle, dying last, dying heroically. There was in fact a stand at Little Big Horn, somewhat like the one we imagine, that was completely successful. Major Reno and his troops formed a circle on the top of a hill, shot their horses, took cover, survived until relieved. I can't find any paintings of that on the web. The imaginary stand beats out the real stand, pictorially. Meanwhile what hid us has been stripped away by drones and night vision and heat-imaging machines. There is less reason to be atop the hill. There are museums of the mountain.¹²

In history painting a nineteenth century

¹² <http://www.messner-mountain-museum.it/en/>. I hesitated over including this reference as speaks more of conquest, a subject for another essay.

compositional convention once seen, never forgotten, is the rising triangle. It's a shape that literally makes history. Washington crossing the Delaware, gives us a man oblivious to the possibility of snipers; the men of the Medusa, rise up in a pyramid; and in "*Brudeferden i Hardanger*" (Bridal Procession on the Hardanger), a man stands in a boat, waving an erect gun. Even when on water, people in history paintings reenact the hill.

How else do we make history?

The problem with history is there is always too much, so we select, we shape, we say some things were "events" and others – drawing water from the well, making bread, hanging laundry – these were mere happenings. This is what Carr was saying, that to write history we need hierarchies which elevate and suppress; we need to say one thing is more important than another by agreed or learned or imposed standard. Since Carr, we have moved away from that confidence. Hence the fight over whose history is history. But triangular forms linger and when it comes to plinths, there's trouble in River City. Even a low plinth elevating an elk, to some people represented hierarchies, memories of past oppression, structures that need changing.¹³

The Roman Senate had a podium, a place for orators to stand to be both seen and heard. To that was added, in 338 B.C.E., the prows of six Carthaginian ships. These were called rostrums. Roman speakers stood on these to celebrate making history.

Possibly the historic term "Levellers" may rise again? Possibly speaking on the podium will go the way of the Chautauqua lecture and the Circuit Rider's sermon, and Edward Everett's two-hour long exposition before Lincoln's speech at Gettysburg? Now we have the Ted Talk on a screen, the Sound Bite, the clip, the gift of the "jif" (GIF).¹⁴ Technology,

you say, has overtaken or at least changed both events and way we talk and how we listen. It has indeed, but there's something in the history of all this you may have missed: Leni Riefenstahl's pivotal role.

There's a geometry in the selection of historical events. Imagine a triangle with experience at one node, describer of experience at another and audience at the third. The audience doesn't want all of it; they only want some. Thus the describer must choose, find not only truth but sense and significance.

Visual and aural artists confront this problem; they must find shapes that allow us to see and hear what they want us to see and hear. Else the description will be a muddle, a mess.

How is an event transformed from the muddle of experience into something we remember or note? First it must find a place among our reference points. People fight fires all the time, but this fire with that particular fireman washing his face in that swimming pool... is newsworthy. Unless, of course, the photographer has invited the fireman to pose. Then the photographer gets "let go" for cheating, because one may compose (frame) a news photo but not pose it and thus, as painters did in the nineteenth century, create history. Similar but different point, if Robert Capra's photo of the dying Republican soldier is a capture from combat, then it is one thing; if it's an image from training maneuvers it's another.

Words shape our thought. And we respond with shaped words. We walk onto a podium, up to a lectern, stand straight and explain our position. We take a stand on the stand and expand. This is the elevated and elevating geometry of taking a stand.

In political campaigns and in office, Teddy Roosevelt used the "bully pulpit." From the eighteenth century onwards political candidates "mounted the hustings" to speak. Before

¹³ <https://www.oregonlive.com/portland/2020/07/iconic-portland-elk-statue-removed-from-downtown-after-fire-set-during-protest.html>.

¹⁴ <https://www.ou.org/life/inspiration/its-pronounced-jif-not-giff-and-why-that-matters/>.

that a husting was a place that housed a tribunal or court, a place where nobles gathered to make decisions. Like Moot Hill.

We still journey towards Leni Riefenstahl... and Hannah Arendt. For many years intellectual historians made the case that World War One marked a watershed or rupture in thought and culture. Paul Fussell, Modris Ecksteins, Eric Leed and others argued in different ways for this proposition, referring to “high culture.” My own work has been about how people like my grandfather kept their heads down, experienced the First World War aurally, had their visual world reduced by living in trenches. On the Western Front Germans mostly had the high ground, the slight elevation, which could be studied with a mirror on the end of a bayonet, or a true periscope. Soldiers came to see the formal beauty of close things: weapons and explosions, the latter inverted triangles, capable of re-shaping and even obliterating hills. Ground was no longer an immovable feature. And words? The older generations’ ornate, winding speeches were clearly not to be trusted. You killed, lay flat like Major Reno’s men, hoped that the arc of shell or bullet was not headed to that very spot. At Gettysburg troops stood, endured the test. My grandfather’s hilltop stand was not vertical, not about standing up, until the moment they all retreated. And how was the fighting commemorated? With the Vimy Ridge memorial. Men were clearly not yet done with pillars of wisdom, verticality, shafts of light reaching into the sky.

Skip ahead for a moment, to make change more visible. In 1967 American Dan Gurney won the 24 hour Le Mans race. Handed a celebratory bottle of champagne, he decided to shake, open and aim. Gesture in place of taking a stand, saying nothing on the podium, spraying bubbly all over. Since then, the gesture has

become a tradition.¹⁵

The sporting podium. At the Olympic Games athletes who win are expected to shut up and stand straight, the gold medalist above all others. This arrangement dates from 1932 and was inspired by the Empire Games of 1930.¹⁶ Why stand in silence in 1930? At that point national anthems had become commonplace, as had radio broadcasting, but amplified speaking to huge crowds was in its infancy. The key to understanding this moment is to think about the transition from acting in silent movies to the advent of talkies. Standing silently on a podium belongs with the silence of movies. The victors pose like statues. Like Patience on a Monument.

Ray Müller’s marvelous documentary film, *The Wonderful Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl* shows footage Riefenstahl shot before she achieved *Triumph of the Will*, her award-winning movie about the 1934 party rally in Nuremberg.¹⁷ In the earlier footage the party had not figured out formal discipline; they look unorganized. *Triumph of the Will*, by contrast, solves the problem of how a leader can appear simultaneously to be “of the people” and god-like; Hitler descends from the heavens in a silvery plane, takes salutes on a podium to which all eyes rise, marches among adoring Nazis. His thoughts are amplified and broadcast and, through the illusion of film editing, individuals respond as if in call-and-response exchange with him. Everyone can hear. The silence of the Olympic podium, a visual event, becomes a visual *and* aural event that roused feelings to the satisfaction even of those at the back who were keeping their eyes down.

Standing stones are a marvel, a gift from people who thought them necessary or somehow worth the effort. When you come close to them on Orkney or elsewhere you cannot but think of the time and effort involved. For

¹⁵<https://dylar.com/posts/191/how-the-tradition-of-spraying-champagne-after-a-race-began>.

¹⁶<https://olympics.com/en/news/1932-the-podium-makes-its-olympic-debut>.

¹⁷*The Wonderful Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*, 1993.

reasons no one knows, those folk decided that they wanted the stones to make a stand, to have standing, to stand more massively than man. Like other tall monuments, they extend the self, aggrandizing and diminishing at the same time. They are phallic. After visiting Orkney, I wrote a play about a Freudian psychiatrist who thinks that Wilhelm Reich may be on to something. She is my embodiment of aspiration in the Twentieth Century, of hopes and “oughts” that people believed would transform humanity, some of them spoken but others which pose their power. Like many people who worked for Peace and Freedom and Justice, my character is disillusioned by the rise of the Third Reich. She re-trains in surgery, travels to China, witnesses Japanese atrocities. At the finish of the play, she no longer believes in change emanating from any podium; she prefers walking in the Brecon Beacons, a return to the hills. She and the veterans she meets on stage delight in a new shared, veterans’ and Levellers’ geometry: comradeship, communion, camping, all flat all of the time. (Except tents, which are like tiny hills, or mid-dens that you live in.)

How did the podium fare after Hitler? It was a diminished site, a platform with changed significance, with a re-emphasized balance of meanings. Consider how today we characterize someone with strong views as getting on his or her “soap box” and you’ll perhaps see. Hyde Park was acquired by Henry VIII as a place to hunt. James I allowed gentlefolk in. Charles I opened it to the general public. Speakers’ Corner can be traced to the Reform League of 1866 and possibly earlier to the tradition of allowing someone who was going to be hanged – highwayman, for example, people who said “stand and deliver” – to have his or her final say. Tyburn was close to what is now Speakers’ Corner in Hyde Park. Take Ty-

burn away, untune that string, and hark what soapboxes follow. The meaning of public flat space changed.¹⁸ Historian Carole O’Reilly has highlighted this, noting that the meaning and role of parks changed from the Victorian to the Edwardian period. In the Victorian period, ideas of social control inherent in concepts of ‘rational recreation’ abounded, while in the Edwardian period new forms of urban identity and attachment were formed by spontaneous games, unintended uses, and political meetings.

Today we expect change to come from a large march, a gathering on the Washington Mall, taking to the streets with banners and chants. Many of my students think change comes from “raising consciousness,” and they make art aimed at that. Some people have set themselves the task of “curing” systemic racism. Perhaps we can wipe out that disease by having our bodies act in the manner of anti-bodies?¹⁹ Where though?

If a rupture is going to happen, will it be when we sit in meditation, when we “stand with,” when we shine our lights in the darkness of a stadium? Should we sign petitions on Facebook? If we go to the hills and sing, might the world improve? Or end?

Mounting a podium today is not what it was when I started my career. Back then I would write out complex arguments and tour the audience through my thoughts. To stand today without a PowerPoint is now deemed odd. A long speech is more likely to make an audience shift in their seats than change their minds. Could Lincoln deliver even something as short as the Gettysburg Address and expect a hearing?

If yoga were common practice, we might expect people on a podium to value flexibility as well as strength. Maybe one day we’ll all learn to squat? Certainly if we were snakes or invertebrates we would have different metaphors, a

¹⁸<https://www.playingpasts.co.uk/articles/the-great-outdoors/a-brief-history-of-british-public-parks-before-1870/>.

¹⁹<https://curingracism.com/>.

different relationship to elevation; there would be no stands taken and no podiums.

Scholars break reality into pieces so that they may examine each bit clearly and then declare how the pattern of evidence holds together. This we hope in some instances may lead not only to enlightenment but to enlightened behavior, more humane behavior, better people. Meanwhile we have expanded the size of our tribes, our armies, our desires. Standing to deliver now competes with advertising and sport and spectacle; it may be ignored, or it may catch the attention of millions. From time to time it catches the attention of those who maintain their power with machine guns, artillery, drones.

Thus, one of the things to know before you make a stand is whether or not others will see you as cannon fodder; there have always been surprises and Ides. Could it be that many people fear public speaking, standing on a rostrum, because they sense a past (occasionally also present) association with violence? We are told to imagine an audience naked, which is to say without arms and armor, harmless.

Somerset Maugham's narrator in "The Book Bag," sounds like a levelling person, "I never cease to wonder at the impertinence of great readers who, because they are such, look down on the illiterate. From the standpoint of what eternity is it better to have read a thousand books than to have ploughed a million furrows?"²⁰ But he isn't a levelling person; he's making the argument that as an activity reading is without moral value, nor high nor low, neutral as anything in *Godot*.

Should a piece about the podium, hills and flatlands rise to a crescendo or coast to a close, like a car on the flat? To indicate that they were peaceful citizens, at Peterloo people wore their Sunday best. But it was a snake that came out of the jungle, in the form of Yeoman cavalry, led by a man who thought sitting

astride a horse entitled him to look down upon a pedestrian rabble. His swords bit them. On Gandhi's march to the sea and after Selma, resistance did better, solving the problem of "which one is Gandhi" or "where's Martin" with visual de-emphasizing of hierarchies and, of course, amazing courage. Humanity on the march currently looks as chaotic as pre-*Triumph* Nazis, but is locally organized, tweeting, in search of a level playing field. The Arab Spring and Black Lives Matter and the *Gilets Jaunes* gathered in ways that Paris in May '68 could not imagine. Minds do change, sometimes without much leadership and possibly in ways more like what Heidegger described than anything Lenin or Trotsky urged. In our minds inherited geometry abides and morphs. I wrote at the outset that everything happens somewhere. We may well be becoming. Hannah Arendt finished with a cry against suicide, quoting Acts, "Do thyself no harm; for we are all here."

We are, we are.

References

- Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Schocken, 2004.
- Carr, Edward Hallett. *What is History?* New York: Vintage, 1967.
- Ecksteins, Modris. *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989.
- Fussell, Paul. *The Great War and Modern Memory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.
- Hughes, H. Stuart. *Consciousness and Society*. New York: Vintage, 1977.
- Lawrence, T.E. *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph*. New York: Anchor Books, 1991.
- Leed, Eric. *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Maugham, W. S. *The Best Short Stories*. New

²⁰W. Somerset Maugham, *The Best Short Stories* (New York: Modern Library/ Random House, 1957) 242.

York: Modern Library/ Random House,
1957.

Müller, Ray (director). *The Wonderful Horrible
Life of Leni Riefenstahl*, 1993.

Copyright © 2022 Ritchie.

Correspondence: David Ritchie, e: profdritch@gmail.com.

Received: 6 October, 2021.

Accepted: 25 November, 2021.

Financial statement: The scholarship for this article was conducted at the author's own expense.

Competing interests: The author has declared no competing interests.

How to cite: Ritchie, David. "Event and elevation." *Inscriptions* 5, no. 1 (January 2022): [64-73](#).

Ereignis Institute

Ereignis Institute prepares the ground for enhanced perception and the good life. We provide short, incisive lectures available at your convenience, with optional readings and easy access to instructors. Our approach to the question of how to live well owes much to the ethical tradition from Epicurus: friendly to science, fiercely sense-oriented, and dedicated to the presumption that our actions are oriented towards achieving pleasure and peace of mind.

- Philosophies of life technologies: 12 week course module with Dr. Torgeir Fjeld €100.
- Ethics after Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morality I: Eight lectures with Dr. Mehdi Parsa €100.

institute.ereignis.no/

Hedgehogs by Christopher Norris

Hedgehogs is a sequence of poems and verse-essays about Jacques Derrida. Witty, ironic, reflective, discursive, and narrative in character Christopher Norris offers fresh points of engagement for philosophers and literary critics.

E-book €8.50 / Softbound €17.70

utopos.tankebanen.no/

Support independent publishing

Inscriptions is a peer-reviewed journal run and funded wholly by enthusiasts. While the journal is open access and free of author fees our beautiful print version can be ordered from our distributor. Support the journal by subscribing.

One year (two issues) €40

inscriptions.tankebanen.no/